

Transcript of letter written by Captain Howard Greene, Co. B, 24th Reg., Wis. Vol., dated Jan. 13, 1863  
The first pages of this letter is missing. It apparently described the march from Nashville toward  
Murfreesboro on Dec. 30, 1862

I will now make an attempt to continue my a/c of our share of the battle. By 3 o'clock in the morning of Wednesday the 31st of Dec. 1862 we are drawn up in line of Battle anxiously awaiting the attack we expected at or before daylight While standing in line, one of my men, Charles Ellmaker accidentally fired off his gun, the ball passing through his hand between the thumb and forefinger and just grazing his head. The battery which we had been supporting the night before had been withdrawn to the rear, and we were now unsupported, this being only our line of Battle. Just before 6 o'clock three Regiments were marched in and formed directly in our rear as our support. They stayed then 10 or 15 minutes when all but one were withdrawn and marched off somewhere to our right. This maneuver was hardly executed before heavy firing was heard on our picket line and Lieut. Kennedy sent word that the enemy was advancing in heavy force. Soon the firing became constant and it was but a short time before the pickets were driven in, and came and rejoined the company. I had one platoon out as skirmishers, and they had hardly got formed in position on the left of the company before the Rebels came up over the hill - five regiments deep, closed in mass, and yelling and firing like all (*illegible*). Then the Battle commenced in earnest, and for some time the roar of musketry was incessant and almost deafening. Almost the first volley laid low my orderly Geo. Edi (*illegible* ?), who was struck by a ball right over the left eye, but it fortunately, I have since heard, only went to the skull bone and then glanced, inflicting only a flesh wound. soon the shot struck others and they commenced to drop all around me - and no wonder for our Regiment alone was fighting five. To add to our troubles the Regiment fronted on our right was driven back - our flank thereby turned and a crossfire poured in on us. At this time also our Brigadier was killed. Such odds as now opposed us, no single Regiment could stand a great while, and the order was given to retreat. Our acting Major not repeating the order as he ought to have done (instead of attending to his business, he was hiding behind a tree (Capt. Baumbach). I did not hear it and neither did Lieut. Kennedy so we kept our Companies together still fighting until, looking around, we saw the rest of the Regt. in full retreat, we also marched our companies off the field. The Regiment retreated in some confusion, but in less than 10 minutes we had rallied, formed in line and were again marching forward to engage in the contest, rendered now a little more equal by the arrival of another brigade to our assistance. The enemy, however, had caught the Division on our right napping - had forced them back, and by that means, flanking us, so that we were again compelled to retire, or else be soon under another crossfire. It was during the second retreat that George Rockwell was shot. He was compelled to retreat across a large open cornfield in plain view of the enemies batteries and they opened on us with shot and shells quite lively. The shells came falling "thick and fast like Lightning from the Mountain Cloud" all aimed at our devoted heads. We dodged them as best we could and got off on the whole very fortunately. While on this march Ed Holton was walking next to me, George Rockwell next to him, and ????? next to George. We all heard the shot coming that struck George, and all dropped on our faces hoping it would pass over us and bury itself in the Earth. Unfortunately for George, it had reached its destination, and striking him on the Leg just below the hip, tore it open to the Knee, making a wound full six inches in width. George lived for two days, suffering but little pain, and died easily. - May he rest in peace poor fellow! He fought bravely on that day and met a brave man's death, bravely too.

To return to my account - after retreating across the cornfield we came to the woods in which we were stationed the afternoon previous. Here we again formed, planted our Batteries, and prepared to make another stand. Soon, however, the Roar of Battle on the Right told but too plainly that we were again to be driven in that Quarter, and that if we retained our present position for any length of time the enemy would be in our rear. So there was nothing to do but retreat again. We retreated back through the woods, the enemy closely pursuing - crossed the pike - struck into a sort of Cypress Swamp and then made another stand. Soon, however, the noise on our right warned us that we were still being driven in that quarter and so we retreated again. Soon the fighting swung around still farther on our right, then commencing heavily close on our left. Then sharply in our front, and a few minutes later in our rear. In fact we were surrounded by a cordon of fire, and the Balls from all directions centering in the belt of woods in which we lay. I for one thought we were entirely surrounded, - that the Rebels had us in their power and would capture our whole Brigade, and visions of Vicksburg, Mobile and other Southern cities floated before my eyes rather too vividly to be pleasant.

Fortunately however, the forces of ours on our left not only sustained their ground but drove the enemy, thereby making a loop whole out of which we crawled - marched across another open field, obtained the shelter of a Railroad Bank by the side of which we marched until we struck another piece of woods. By this time we had marched to the rear of our Division, and as we were going through the woods off to the left in an open field we could see our batteries belching forth and Regiment after Regiment in the deadly fray. About this time an order came for our Brigade to go to the rear to protect the trains from the Cavalry that were threatening them. We marched about three miles before reaching the train and upon arriving there found our Cavalry drawn up in line of Battle, and away across the open fields, in plain sight were the enemy's Cavalry, also in line of Battle, apparently unable to decide whether it were best to make the attack or not. After some little time they concluded best not to attempt it and wheeled round to gallop off. They kept threatening the trains all the afternoon however and we therefore remained where we were.

That night's Roll Call was a sad Roll Call to me. We had gone into the fight that morning with 47 men and two officers and that night at Roll Call only 16 men and one officer answered to their names. The balance were killed, wounded and missing - I know not which. Capt Eldred had fallen out about 10 o'clock, since when I had heard not a word and I supposed him also a prisoner. We had marched and fought all day without anything to eat and it looked as though we were going supperless to bed. You may imagine how ??? provisions were from the fact that Tuesday afternoon when we lay in the open field exposed to that heavy artillery fire, I got an ear of corn and eat it raw with the greatest relish in the world. Our boys in looking round espied a House a short distance off and thinking there might be some eatables there made for it at once and soon returned with some nice Bacon, so that after all we had Bacon and Coffee for supper and then for variety Coffee and Bacon for breakfast New Years Morn. And so the old year of 1862 went out and the New Year of 1863 came in. A stormy winding sheet the old Year certainly had here in the West, and it took its departure amidst the Groans and Death agonies of many a man suffering for that attention which the wounded so much need but rarely can get until after the Battle is over.

On New Years morning we were not left long in idleness. At 6 o'clock we commenced our march to the front and were placed on the reserve or third line of Battle. By this time Rosecrans had a new line of Battle formed, earthworks thrown up and his Army put into proper shape. We were stationed within a stones throw of the General Headquarters and could see him as and went all day. No matter how heavy the firing - whether we were whipping or being whipped he maintained the same cool and collected look as though everything was going to suit him. This I also noticed the day before in Sheridan. When we were being forced rapidly, the enemy turning us on the right - placing Sheridan's Division in bad positions he could not help, he still kept on smoking his Cigar, giving his orders as quietly as though sitting in his tent in a quiet camp.

After getting into position New Years morn, we stacked our arms and lay down to rest but every hour or so as the tide of Battle rolled nearer to us and they became hotly engaged in our front, we would be brought to attention, so as to be ready at any moment to march forward to the assistance of our Brothers in the front. Fortunately they did not need us, and we did not get engaged again - the old year ending the fighting of the 24th Wis in that Battle and I hope in the War.

About noon of 1st January our Company was ordered off about a mile to the rear to take charge of a lot of Prisoners and in that beautiful business we were engaged during the balance of the Battle. During Thursday there was not a great deal of very heavy fighting tho' they occasionally had some pretty lively fighting, both on the Right Left and Center'. By Friday we had got together about 400 Prisoners so that we had all that we could do with our Company to take care of them. It remained pretty quiet all day Friday until about 3 o'clock, when Rosecrans marched a small force out apparently to take a Battery of the enemy. - They (the Rebels?) marched a larger force towards that one to try to take it. Our men allowed themselves to be driven, but when the Rebels got into the position Rosecrans wished, he opened on them from Market Batteries, both on the Right, Left and Front. The Rebels replied with all the guns they could bring to bear and sent forward more reinforcements as if determined to carry the point and well nigh they did. Now came the severest fighting of the whole Battle. Cannon shot fell thick and fast in volleys, while the Musketry was perfectly fearful. Soon they commenced to drive us, and we who were in the rear guarding Prisoners, were placed in a delicate position. We had some 400 Prisoners and only 60 for a guard. They saw we were being driven and commenced to hurrah. We immediately moved them off further to the rear so as to bring them into a safe position, for at the time of the Battle we were within a half mile and less of where it was raging the thickest. The Prisoners joy, however, soon fled, for after being driven across the River, our men rallied, charged through the river breast deep and drove the enemy like chaff before the wind, followed them to

their own Breastworks and drove them from these, occupying them themselves. This days fighting was the most severe and terrific of the whole Battle. Next to it was that in which we were engaged on Wednesday. The greatest wonder to me was that more were not killed, and although the slaughter was perfectly terrific - the dead and wounded laying in piles.

On Saturday we drove them from their entrenchments and late that night they evacuated their position in hot haste and started for the South. I lost out of 47 men taken into action 23 men - 3 killed, 10 wounded, and 10 missing. Those missing are mostly if not all prisoners and I understand that some of them are wounded though I am not certain of it. Fridays fight really ended the Battle, altho' they had some bitter fighting on Saturday. On Sunday we occupied Murfreesboro and on Monday morning our Regiment Marched to this Camp which is some 4 miles South of the town. As near as can be ascertained the Rebels were badly whipped and have retreated to Chattanooga, tho' they still keep strong Cavalry pickets very near to us. I was going to give Lizzie an a/c of the Battle but do not feel like rewriting 12 or 13 pages, so I wish you would send this a/c to them for perusal and ask them to forward it to Mother who will return it to you again.

I do not feel much better today - my headache still clinging to me.

Love to your Mother and self,

I remain, Howard